

## **Dr. Daniel J. Treier, Proverbs, Session 3**

### **Proverbs 10-29, Vices**

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This is Dr. Daniel J. Treier in his teaching on Proverbs for Christian Living. This is session number three, Proverbs 10-29, Capital Vices.

This is our third lecture on reading Proverbs for Christian Living, now addressing Proverbs 10-29 in terms of seven capital Vices.

Traditional Christian teaching about virtues and vices can help us with synthesizing and applying Proverbs' collected moral wisdom. Whereas individual Proverbs are memorable, and sometimes multiple Proverbs are placed together in thematic clusters, the application of these Proverbs can seem very sporadic as we encounter them in particular, sometimes almost isolated contexts. Being situation-specific is part of their genius, but this genius can hide their larger-scale coherence.

Their shared vision of what it means to fear the Lord by maintaining the bonds of covenant faithfulness and communal flourishing in the context of the created world. Ideally, the tradition of cardinal and theological virtues offers a language with which to communicate Proverbs' positive moral vision. Human beings, however, are now brimming over with selfish folly, with idolatry instead of fidelity to God, and injustice instead of charity.

Vices, the opposite of virtues, need their day in court. In Christian circles, the crucial vices have become misleadingly known as the seven deadly sins. Films, documentaries, and even books now explore this paradigm, sometimes even celebrating the sins.

But the typical focus on sins, which people associate with particular acts, already distorts what this paradigm intends to address. The capital vices are called that because they are sinful dispositions from which other sins spring, like roots to flowers and trees. As such, capital vices deal with the heart too closely for anyone's comfort, not just behavioral outcomes.

Thereby, they offer a recipe not for legalism or despair, but for the self-knowledge that accompanies a covenant relationship with God, ultimately new life in Christ by the Spirit. Pagans can recognize the problems associated with at least some of the vices, but disordered desire is their root. So, unless a person has their desires healed by the love of God, any attempts to conquer these vices will basically shift around deck chairs on the Titanic, because temporarily conquering lust or gluttony or the like may only enhance enslavement to pride.

That's at least true at the level of individual life. But again, as we saw in the last lecture, there's also some societal incentive and value to having people realize at least the partial self-control of overcoming certain vices and the partial realization of certain virtues. Now, there are various Christian listings of these vices.

They're not always seven in number. For the sake of simplicity and economy, here, I'm going to treat seven and place vainglory, which fairly commonly comes in these lists, I'm going to place it under the heading of pride. Pride is usually taken to be the cardinal root of these capital vices.

There's no ordered relationship between all of the others. There's no exact order that has always won the day, but pride is usually seen as somehow being at the root. Here, we're going to proceed in the reverse of Dante's order.

His circles of hell and terraces of the purgatorial mountain imply that the respective vices descend farther and farther away from the fear of God, while an ascent toward purity must begin with confronting pride. The overall order, then, that we're going to treat them in is increasingly reflecting the opposite of true charity, with pride as the ultimate opposite, and then envy, wrath, sloth, greed, gluttony, and lust. We're going to start with lust because in a sense for Dante and many others, it's not that that's the farthest away from true charity, it's that that's kind of the easiest departure from true charity.

And so, we'll sort of start with lust and work our way up. Starting with lust will point us to the fact that everybody exercises their freedom in light of various loves, in light of various desires. And these vices reflect various aspects of self-love and world-love that contradict God-love and neighbor-love, in which true wisdom is found and true righteousness is found.

So, for Dante, three vices, wrath, envy, and pride, distinctively harm others through the love of self. Sloth is a vice that reflects defective love for God, in which our love for God lacks our whole heart. And then three other vices, lust, gluttony, and greed, involve excessive love for creaturely goods relative to God.

So, in a sense, he's suggesting a kind of pedagogy in which we begin our return toward God by addressing our excessive love for creaturely goods, more wholly loving God himself, and then we are able to stop harming others through our love of self. Of course, the very flexibility of these lists from the Christian tradition in both the content and the order of the vices acknowledges that there are numerous interrelationships among our disordered desires. The present list begins with the deadly sin, then, that is subject to the most mockery in contemporary Western culture, lust.

The Christian tradition is treated, by many theologians no less, as a source of body-denying prudery at best, and repression at worst. No doubt there are some unhealthy elements among classic Christian thinkers when it comes to sexual ethics. Yet far from simply despising the body, they actually recognized its integral influence in a human person more acutely than many contemporaries do.

Precisely our appreciation of physical goods requires, as Rebecca de Young says, that we not try to use them to satiate our spiritual needs, which drives so much of our lust as a habit of trying to engineer our own happiness for ourselves on our own terms. Lust, in other words, flowers from roots in pride. Much of Proverbs' opposition to lust already surfaced in chapters 1 through 9. If those texts depict not only physical but also to some degree spiritual adultery, that is fitting because the latter, spiritual adultery, involves the dynamics of covenant-breaking self-love.

Proverbs doesn't altogether stop warning of these dangers after chapter 9. For instance, in 22:14, the mouth of a loose woman is a deep pit. He with whom the Lord is angry falls into it. Notice that in some of these Proverbs, the adulteress becomes an instrument of divine punishment for folly and spiritual adultery more generally.

Hence, loving pleasure, and by the way, lust is not just about sex, it's about pleasure more broadly, loving pleasure can lead to poverty, according to Proverbs. Whoever loves pleasure will suffer want. Whoever loves wine and oil will not be rich, 21:17. People dominated by their desire wind up spending all day scheming over how to do evil, 21:25 and 26, and 24:8 and 9. However, some people can counteract such unbridled desire.

The desire of the righteous ends only in good, the expectation of the wicked in wrath, 11:23. Victory over lust, therefore, lies not in becoming creatures without desire, an impossible task. To the contrary, victory lies in reordering the object, nature, and extent of our desires so that righteousness replaces evil self-interested scheming. With respect to sex in particular, a healthy marriage can be a crucial component of such reordered desire that Proverbs calls for.

Yet people should not be naive as many well-intended abstinence campaigns appear to be about marital sex solving the problem of lust. It doesn't, it's part of a more comprehensive form of healing. Moreover, other elements of shalom, on which Proverbs bases its appeal for chastity, a good name, adequate resources, security, social harmony rather than strife, and so forth, these other elements of shalom can also become disordered, as several other vices demonstrate, if our pursuit of shalom is not oriented by the fear of the Lord, ultimately.

The Christian tradition recognizes that vices, like virtues, are linked. The fathers believed that the pleasures of the table, in particular, lead inexorably to those of the

flesh. Then it's but a few steps farther to jealousy, anger, violence, and the spiritual sloth that destroys the soul.

The way to a man's heart is through his stomach, says Kleinberg. So, gluttony and lust, love of pleasure, particularly sexual pleasure, and love of food and drink, are linked. But gluttony is not as simple as eating or enjoying too much.

Rebecca de Young suggests the acronym FRESH to summarize the variety of errors that are at stake here. Eating fastidiously, ravenously, excessively, sumptuously, hastily. Gluttony, in other words, embodies self-preoccupation regarding food, using it to satisfy the soul apart from God.

While gluttony may be a matter of binges, comfort food, fast food, a sweet tooth, or the like, alternatively, it may involve wrongful asceticism or preoccupation with weight control. Proverbs associates the wicked with a craving for food. The Lord does not let the righteous go hungry, but he thwarts the craving of the wicked, 10:3. According to 20:13, God provides for righteous people who work.

Do not love sleep, or else you will come to poverty. Open your eyes, and you will have plenty of bread. God meets the genuine needs of our bellies.

Nevertheless, full satisfaction is found elsewhere. 18:20, from the fruit of the mouth, one's stomach is satisfied. The yield of the lips brings satisfaction.

In other words, this intriguing parallelism here regarding the mouth locates full satisfaction in righteousness and wisdom as displayed, for instance, in timely speech, what comes out of our mouth rather than what goes in. Meanwhile, more mundane satisfaction from food actually requires moderation, neither too little nor too much. If you have found honey, eat only enough for you, or else, having too much, you will vomit it, 25:16.

It is not good to eat much honey or to seek honor on top of honor, 25:27. The sated appetite spurns honey, but to a ravenous appetite, even the bitter is sweet, 27:7. How many of us have to admit to grabbing extra items of food at parties or at the dinner table, and to the bizarre awareness that we long more to possess them in place of others than to eat them for genuine enjoyment at a certain point? Proverbs further confronts folly related to drink.

Wine is a mocker, strong drink, a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise, 20 verse 1. Whoever loves pleasure will suffer want, whoever loves wine and oil will not be rich, 21:17. Do not be among wine-bibbers or among gluttonous eaters of meat, for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty and drowsiness will clothe them with rags, 23:20 and 21. Indeed, gluttony easily fosters other vices, such as sloth, and Proverbs treats the dangers of wine at length in chapter 23.

Gluttony has social implications. Those who keep the law are wise children, but companions of gluttons shame their parents, 28:7. Now, while preoccupation with reputation presents several dangers, these are soon to surface when it comes to envy and vainglory and pride, there remains in Proverbs a healthy form of social awareness about others' perceptions of our self-control.

Against excessive scrupulousness and seared consciences alike, the message of Proverbs when it comes to food and drink is consistent with 1 Corinthians 10:31. Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God, and promote the glory of God is going to mean some self-awareness about social perceptions of our self-control. Like lust and gluttony, avarice or greed deals with misshapen desire. De Young points out that Thomas Aquinas describes greed's object as money or whatever money can buy, considered as useful or profitable.

Lust and gluttony, on the other hand, involve a desire for things insofar as they give us physical pleasure. So, at least at the beginning, greed relates money to pleasure instrumentally as a means for obtaining that end. But eventually, and ironically, this form of self-absorption, greed, substitutes money for what it buys.

Money becomes an end in itself, not just a means to the end of some other pleasure. Emblematically, the usurer, the loan shark, tries to make money from money rather than labor, with money replacing everything truly valuable, such as friendship or love. The extent of such tragedy renders greed a sort of spiritual dropsy, in Schiml's words.

It is characterized by an insatiable thirst for water, even though the body is already filled with fluid. Physical and spiritual dropsy are similar also, in that the more the afflicted tries to satisfy his thirst, the more his thirst is stimulated. Greed is when our love of money becomes that way, like spiritual dropsy.

In the classical understanding, virtues stand in between extremes of vice on either side. The virtue that greed opposes is liberality, freely and artfully using money to meet the needs of others and oneself. Seemingly the opposite of greed, prodigality on the other hand, wasting money in other words, also violates liberality, freely and artfully using money to meet the needs of others and oneself.

And wasting money, prodigality may even count as avaricious, as greedy. While lacking a form of attachment to money that leads to careful management, such wastefulness still reflects an excessive desire for money's usefulness. On the other side, the stingy person, whose spending habits seem prudent, maybe avaricious too.

They may hoard money out of a misshapen desire for enjoyment in the future, or out of measuring their own life by money itself. Small wonder then that the love of

money is a root of all kinds of evil, 1 Timothy 6:10. John Cassian treats Judas's betrayal of Christ as a parable of avarice. Learning from that, that avarice moves us to betray one another's humanness.

In so doing, we betray our own humanity as well. One of the more striking illustrations in scripture is Ahab and Jezebel's murder of Naboth in order to acquire his vineyard. The story concludes with this telling line.

Indeed, there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do what was evil in the sight of the Lord, urged on by his wife Jezebel. That's in 1 Kings 21. As with other vices, pride underlies avarice.

We are greedy, wanting money for its own sake as some kind of measure of the self. But ironically, pride goes before a fall. The greedy person ultimately loses the dignity of the self because they become a slave to having money.

We should add a few relevant principles about wealth that are highlighted specifically in Proverbs. I won't have time to go into them in immense detail, but we at least need to profile them in general. Number one, the ill-gotten gain is actually unprofitable.

Proverbs confronts greed in various ways. Wealth hastily gotten will dwindle, but those who gather little by little will increase it, 13:11. Those who are greedy for unjust gain make trouble for their households, but those who hate bribes will live, 15:27, et cetera.

For Proverbs, enjoying wealth is tied to acquiring it rightly, not just exonerating ourselves for avoiding criminal behavior, but considering how our gain affects our community. The acquisition of wealth secondly involves a complex set of factors. Proverbs acknowledges that God's sovereign blessing brings wealth.

The blessing of the Lord makes rich and he adds no sorrow with it, 10:22. But human factors are also pertinent and they are not always positive. The timid become destitute, but the aggressive gain riches, 11:16.

Why should fools have a price in hand to buy wisdom when they have no mind to learn, 17:16? Moreover, even the appearance of wealth can be deceiving. Some pretend to be rich yet have nothing. Others pretend to be poor yet have great wealth, 13:7.

So, the acquisition of wealth is complex. Wealth benefits those who don't hold on to it too tightly. Thirdly, the wealth of the rich is their fortress.

The poverty of the poor is their ruin, 10:15. So, Proverbs is realistic that we need some money to function. But hinting at a broader irony is a passage like 18:11.

The wealth of the rich is their strong city. In their imagination, it is like a high wall. But how secure are we really in our wealth? Well, 1 Timothy 6, I think, is consistent with Proverbs when it says, for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment, verse 17.

And then verses 18 and 19 continue with respect to the rich that they are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future so that they may take hold of the life that really is life. The life that really is life involves both solidly anchored hope for the future and oftentimes some enjoyment of God's temporal provision. But if we want ultimate profit, Proverbs is going to try to get us to think about what is better than other things.

So, riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death, 11:4. Better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble with it. Better is a dinner of vegetables where love is than a fatted ox and hatred with it, 15:16, and 17. We could list numerous other examples of these sorts of better-than sayings.

God made us to work, from Proverbs' perspective, for resources that meet our family's needs and provide moderate delights that are gratefully enjoyed as divine gifts. Yet wealth confronts sinful humans with idolatrous and oppressive dangers. To look ahead briefly, Proverbs 30, 8, and 9, give me neither poverty nor riches, feed me with the food I need, or I shall be full and deny you and say, who is the Lord? Or I shall be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.

This wisdom saying is echoed by Jesus when he teaches us to pray saying, give us this day our daily bread. The vice of sloth, fourthly, gets a multi-layered treatment in Proverbs. First of all, divine provision is usually mediated through hard work, with laziness being a crucial, but by no means exclusive, factor behind poverty.

10:4, a slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich. Those who till their land will have plenty of food, but those who follow worthless pursuits have no sense. 12:7, and I could list a ton of other passages.

So, laziness can be a cause of poverty, and laziness is shameful, according to Proverbs. 10:5, a child who gathers in summer is prudent, but a child who sleeps in harvest brings shame. 10:26, like vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, so are the lazy to their employers.

Ironically, lazy people often do not realize the social slowness around them, but they actually fall victim to pride. 20:6, 16, the lazy person is wiser in self-esteem than seven who can answer discreetly. So, laziness is shameful.

But Proverbs' confrontation of sloth goes beyond condemning laziness, and Proverbs does not simplistically correlate all poverty with laziness. For instance, consider 13:23, the field of the poor may yield much food, but it is swept away through injustice. Furthermore, the Christian tradition defines sloth much more broadly than laziness.

The sin of sloth has two components, *acedia*, which means a lack of caring, an aimless indifference to one's responsibilities to God and to man, that is closer to what we think of as laziness, but also *tristitia*, meaning sadness and sorrow. In its final stages, sloth becomes despair at the possibility of salvation, at the possibility of being transformed by God's grace so that we can meaningfully act and grow and change in the world. Certainly, in Proverbs, a refusal to work can be recognized as problematic in natural or secular terms at the basic level of nature.

However, there's a lurking larger issue in terms of redemptive grace, a refusal to undergo with hope the godly discipline, including work, that fosters wisdom. Often Proverbs associates sloth with disordered and unsatisfied desires, and this association aligns with the broader Christian theological approach to sloth. But we shouldn't misappropriate Proverbs' teaching in simplistically condemning poor people or celebrating workaholism.

Instead, we should hear carefully its deeper call away from vain pursuits and self-preoccupation toward hopeful action that will love God and neighbor. Like the previous vices, the next capital vice, wrath, sins against temperance. Passion, *per se*, is not the problem, only preoccupation with it, as in sloth, or inappropriate pursuit of appropriate objects, as in lust and gluttony, or the pursuit of inappropriate objects, as in greed, when money becomes an end in itself.

Similarly, here, wrath stems from a passion for justice that's activated by some perceived injustice. Often the injustice is real enough, but wrath involves a disproportionate response. Now theological debate continues regarding whether, in cases of genuine injustice, some anger is a vice.

Ephesians 4, 26, and 27 seems to support the case for some kind of righteous anger. Be angry but do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil.

But those church fathers who thought that no anger may rightly persist beyond a mere moment can helpfully challenge our modern celebration of expressiveness and a tendency to coddle our dangerous reactions. At the very least, at a practical level,



we need to discern the when and the how of any appropriate anger. Indeed, in de Young's words, a quick scan of a biblical concordance yields a dozen passages, most of them from Proverbs, giving counsel about anger.

Interestingly, none of these mentions a single word about the object of our anger. The passages on anger's rightful expression can be briefly summarized in the advice, cool it, she says. To begin our examination of Proverbs on this topic, first, are passages treating the violence that often stems from wrath.

Sometimes a means of obtaining riches, 11:16, violence can almost become a desired end in itself, as in chapter 13, verse 2, for example. The wicked may be violent out of hatred for the righteous, 29:10. Frequently, the wicked entice their neighbors, 16, 29, with ambush used as a metaphor for their words, 12:6. Twice we are told that the mouth of the wicked conceals violence, 10:6, and 11.

However, in the end, the violence of the wicked will sweep them away because they refuse to do what is just, 21:7. Second, violence may or may not be physical, operating metaphorically in terms of strife. 10:12a says hatred stirs up strife. 15, 1a says a harsh word stirs up anger.

So, some texts focus on the instigators of wrath into which even wise persons can occasionally fall, hatred, harsh words, and the like. But these instigators do not characterize wise people, and several texts focus instead on those who are characterized by folly, often using the image of starting a fire, the hot-tempered person, 15, 18, the perverse person, 16:28, the scoffer, 22: 10, and 29: 18, the gossip, 16:28, and 26:20, and 21, the greedy, and the godless as well. It should be sobering to realize that indulging wrath quickly places a person among those who are characteristically foolish, 20:3. Therefore, the beginning of strife is like letting out water, so stop before the quarrel breaks out, 17:14.

Fire and water, both things that are easy to lose control of. In another image, 26:17, like somebody who takes a passing dog by the ears is one who meddles in the quarrel of another. Several other passages could be mentioned that relate to this theme, but for now we can ask the question, how do you avoid strife? Well, love covers all offenses, 10:12.

A soft answer turns away wrath, 15:1. Those who are slow to anger, calm contention, 15:18. And in contrast to a greedy person stirring up strife, in 28:25, whoever trusts in the Lord will be enriched. Now, already identified among the instigators of strife is slander, but we need to say a little more about this.

24:28, and 29. Do not be a witness against your neighbor without cause, and do not deceive with your lips. Do not say, I will do to others as they have done to me.

I will pay them back for what they have done. Though false witness against a neighbor seems like an effective weapon, as 25:18 acknowledges, actually like a sparrow in its flitting, like a swallow in its flying, an undeserved curse goes nowhere, 26:2. In fact, a backbiting tongue produces anger as surely as the north wind brings rain, 25:23. In the end then, lying lips conceal hatred, and whoever utters slander is a fool, 10:18.

Fourth, the follies of slander and retribution connect. Since according to James 4:11, and 12, a person who slanders usurps God's position as lawgiver and judge over others. And God does not delegate retribution to just anybody, to people apart from government officials, even when people are genuinely wronged.

Vengeance is mine. I will repay, says the Lord, in Deuteronomy 32 and Romans 12. So do not say, I will repay evil.

Wait for the Lord, and he will help you, Proverbs 20:22. As Paul then picks up further in Romans 12, if your enemies are hungry, give them bread to eat, and if they are thirsty, give them water to drink, for you will heap coals of fire on their heads, and the Lord will reward you, from Proverbs 25. Whether or not their apparent shame leads to repentance, meeting the needs of our enemies promotes charity.

Wrath seems understandable in the face of wrongs we've undergone, along with the very real vulnerability that wronged people feel. But wrath, even despairing wrath, proudly usurps God's prerogatives while misunderstanding the character of justice. Because God's justice can incorporate mercy along with opportunity for reform, at times it may require considerable patience on our part.

Fifth, Proverbs' broadest opposition to wrath regards a quick temper. Fools show their anger at once, but the prudent ignore an insult, 12:16. Rash words bring sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing, 12:18.

One who is quick-tempered acts foolishly, and the schemer is hated, 14:17. Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but one who has a hasty temper exalts folly, 14:29. From a variety of angles, Proverbs correlates a quick temper with what is unsavory.

Folly, wounding, scheming, repeat offenses, and on and on. While we don't have the time and the space to pursue the relevant connections to the New Testament very often, which would more fully develop Proverbs' holistic contribution to biblical theology, here it is obviously worth mentioning the book of James, especially chapter 1, verses 19 and 20, and chapter 3, verses 5 and 6, as well as the mentions of strife, anger, quarrels, dissensions, and factions among the works of the flesh that are opposed to the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5. Wrath not only reflects intemperance, but it also stems from pride. It's the opposite, not only of charity, but

of the fear of the Lord, because we're taking something that is God's prerogative in terms of justice into our own hands.

Rather than fearing and trusting God so that we can be patient with others, we fear loss for ourselves or beloved others, and we lash out. Yet the God whom we say we fear is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, according to an often-repeated Old Testament refrain. We want to be like him, and Proverbs promotes that.

Much that Proverbs calls strife may involve components of another capital vice, envy, a distorted sense of justice, or turning against another party simply for who they are or what they have. Envy, though, is not merely coveting what someone else has or feeling jealous over what could or should belong to oneself. Envy is wishing to have what someone else has and desiring that they not have it.

Envy, in other words, has the neighbor as its object of attack, not just focusing primarily on an object of desire. Envy is sadly integral to the biblical story almost from the beginning, since there can be only one God, to desire the fruit of the tree for being like God, attacked the divine sovereign directly in the garden. The narrative soon follows with Cain's murder of Abel, which transpired out of envy over God's approval.

Envy deals even more deeply than covetousness or jealousy with whom we are on the inside, violating both aspects of charity, love of God, and love of neighbor. Now, as we should expect, Proverbs confronts envy less explicitly than other vices. While Proverbs does address character, not just behavior, the type of literature that Proverbs involves concrete images for the most part.

These concrete images focus primarily on the resulting social practices and public manifestations, such as speech, rather than on internal dispositions themselves directly. Those are hard to speak of in the way that Proverbs does. Thus, envy is difficult to confront directly with the kind of advice Proverbs usually gives.

Nevertheless, Proverbs does baldly say, don't envy the wicked and don't envy the rich in chapters 23 and 24. Plus, many causes of envy are likewise confronted in Proverbs, in terms of lust, gluttony, and greed. The reasons for not envying the wicked or the rich are familiar.

Their hedonism ironically leads to poverty. They introduce chaos and strife into the social order, and they have no future, even if we don't know exactly how God will deal with them. Proverbs describes envy of the rich as an unfortunate fact of cultural life.

Chapter 14, verses 20 and 21, the poor are disliked even by their neighbors, but the rich have many friends. Those who despise their neighbors are sinners, but happy are those who are kind to the poor. Proverbs also confronts problematic attitudes toward our neighbors that can reflect and generate envy.

Whoever belittles another lacks sense, but an intelligent person remains silent, 11:12. The souls of the wicked desire evil. Their neighbors find no mercy in their eyes, 21:10.

Do not rejoice when your enemies fall and do not let your heart be glad when they stumble or else the Lord will see it and be displeased and turn away his anger from them, 24:17, and 18, and so forth. The power of envy is apparent in chapter 27 and verse 4. Wrath is fierce and anger is a flood, but who can stand before jealousy? And in 14:30, the life of the body is a healthy heart, but jealousy is a rot of the bones, as Tremper Longman translates it. Jealousy can have a positive connotation within a covenant when God or a married person is appropriately zealous for the loving fidelity of their partner.

Here, though, we're dealing with the rotten envy that eats away at one's insides until it surfaces in a way that spreads harm. Ultimately, therefore, the capital vice of pride goes before a fall. A distorted sense of oneself, whether inflated by glory or deflated by an inability to trust in God's love, disorders our desires for creaturely goods, as in lust, gluttony, and greed, and disorders our responses to other people, as in wrath and envy.

If the distortion of being deflated, of being unable to trust in God's love, sloth, can sometimes be publicly evident, whereas it seems like pride can be hidden, that is only a relative contrast. Pride will eventually manifest itself, and then we encounter vainglory. The two are conceptually distinguishable.

Pride deals with striving to promote the self in ways the self approves. Vainglory deals with striving to please others. Excellence can be a legitimate pursuit appropriate for a culture to recognize.

In our contemporary culture, though, and probably in many others, people are more interested in the opinion of others than in excellence itself, and this myopia brings vainglory and pride closer together. It's ironic that the contemporary lust for authenticity and self-expression can coexist with a craven need for affirmation from others. Social media, as they're called, or anti-social media as they might actually be, require a lot of particular reflection on this overlap between vainglory and pride at the moment.

Vainglory can involve seeking praise for something unworthy, or seeking praise from a worthless source, but also seeking praise from others for one's own rather than

God's or the neighbor's sake. Pride can involve seeing oneself as the cause of achievements, believing oneself to deserve these achievements even if they come from God, boasting of qualities one actually lacks, or despising others who lack what one has. That list coming especially from Schimmel.

Biblical wisdom's distinctive celebration of humility does not oppose proper human dignity, freedom, and individuality. Proverbs presumes that fear of the Lord and traditional guidance place the self in a context that makes it possible to delight in the created world and in the human community, to develop as a healthy person whose uniqueness emerges in honoring God and blessing others rather than being radically autonomous. Given how much we are actually shaped by our relational contexts anyway, whether we admit it or not, the choice is not between human individuality and traditional communities, but rather between various types of social formation.

Humility then doesn't involve groveling like a worm, denying the dignity of the individual or the uniqueness of the individual, but instead refusing to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, recognizing not only your particular weaknesses but also your particular strengths in relation to God and others. Romans 12:3. When we come to how Proverbs treats pride, we see quickly that God opposes the proud. 15:25, for instance, the Lord tears down the house of the proud but maintains the widow's boundaries.

16:5, all those who are arrogant are an abomination to the Lord. Be assured they will not go unpunished. 16:18 and 19, famously, pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall.

It is better to be of a lowly spirit among the poor than to divide the spoil with the proud. Conversely, 22:4, the reward for humility and fear of the Lord is riches and honor and life. The danger of pride is clear in 26:12. Do you see persons wise in their own eyes? There is more hope for fools than for them.

At the root of folly, we might say, is pride. Yet, Proverbs does not reject every form of seeking honor. The book emphasizes that pride actually brings dishonor and humility the reverse.

Chapter 11, verse 2. When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but wisdom is with the humble. A healthy community recognizes the wisdom of humble people and disregards fools. 26.1, like snow in summer or rain in harvest, so honor is not fitting for a fool.

22:1, a good name is to be chosen rather than great riches and favor is better than silver or gold. There is a difference between pridefully pursuing honor solely for oneself to the detriment of others or the denial of having received divine gifts.

There's a difference between that and seeking acceptance as a responsible member of a covenant-keeping community.

Indeed, Augustine cautions, that often the contempt of vainglory becomes a source of even more vainglory, for it is not being scorned when the contempt of vainglory is something one is proud of. We can try to posture as if we are humble people, as the strange new tick of athletes who say that they are really humbled by receiving some honor. That verbal tick is quite revealing about a sort of false humility in our culture.

So various proverbs indicate that social status is a test of character. 27:21, the crucible is for silver and the furnace is for gold, so a person is tested by being praised. There is a temptation to curry favor with others rather than dealing with truth in love.

We must, however, believe that whoever rebukes a person will afterward find more favor than one who flatters with the tongue. 28:23, in a healthy covenant community, social approval may follow godly action, but in a fallen world, we often need enough fortitude to fear God rather than being enslaved to others' opinions. After all, appearances can be deceiving.

As we noted earlier, some pretend to be rich yet have nothing, and others pretend to be poor yet have great wealth. As Augustine comments, the thing really to be afraid of regarding riches is pride. He uses the analogy of a bloated wineskin to illustrate the way in which a person relying on riches may appear to be full while actually being an empty beggar.

And fools may project confidence, but we should recognize wisdom in a different way. 12:15, fools think their own way is right, but the wise listen to advice. 13:10, by insolence, the heedless make strife, but wisdom is with those who take advice.

In sum, as the opposite of pride, biblical humility fosters virtuous character through faith's fear of God leading to charity, the opposite of lust, and other capital vices. Such humility does not destroy individuality or deny every form of social status. Seeking to avoid moral disrepute in the covenant community is a legitimate goal.

Pursuing recognition as a wise person can be healthy. Deadly pride becomes involved when people pursue recognition against others or apart from divine grace, failing to love God and neighbor, serving only themselves. The analogy that we've been developing between the divine and the human households in Proverbs pedagogy reinforces the deadliness of pride.

Those who refuse to accept correction from earthly friends and parents arrogantly reject the discipline of God. As the opposite of fearing the Lord, pride goes before an

eventual fall. But sometimes fearing the Lord will call for courageous individuality contra the gang, an implication of true humility.

Indeed, people may develop some preliminary elements of prudence or other cardinal virtues apart from faith, but even that modest moral progress would require a measure of humility to listen to the right people in the right way. We may hope by God's grace that this humility will point people who are initially on the path to virtue toward their deeper spiritual need, ultimately developing the theological virtues in them by connecting them with the fear of the Lord as the beginning of true, holistic, integrated wisdom.

This is Dr. Daniel J. Treier in his teaching on Proverbs for Christian Living. This is session number three, Proverbs 10-29, Capital Vices.